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SÈVRES CHINA.



SÈVRES SNUFF-BOX. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION.

THE history of the ware of Sèvres really commenced with the invention of soft-paste porcelain, at St. Cloud. The secret was carried from this place to Chantilly by two brothers, named Dubois, formerly pupils

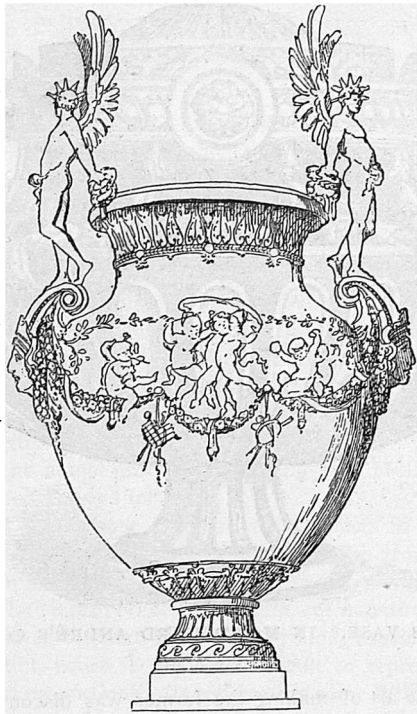
at St. Cloud, and upon their offering to sell their information to the French Government every facility was afforded them, and a laboratory furnished by the Intendant of Finance in the Château de Vincennes. After three years' trial, however, they were expelled, not having fulfilled their contract satisfactorily. One of their workmen, however, Gravant by name, an intelligent man, had gained much useful information, which he sold to the Intendant. In 1745 a company was formed by Charles Adam, a sculptor, and certain privileges were granted. Eight years afterward, however, these privileges were transferred to Eloy Richard, and the king (Louis XV.) took an active interest, paying one third of the expenses, and allowing it to assume the title of "Manufacture Royale de Porcelaine de France." The two L's in reversed ciphers became the regular mark, and the first letter of the alphabet between them formed the distinguishing date-mark (1753), commencing this new starting-point in the factory's history, the rest of the alphabet denoting successive years, until (omitting W) Z was reached in 1777. The double-letter period then commenced, A A for 1778; and so on until R R denoted 1795, when this mode of marking was discontinued, until in 1801 the new signs adopted by the government of that time were used.

From the king's partnership dated the prosperity of the factory, and in 1756 the buildings at Vincennes having become too cramped for the operations, the company built a large and suitable edifice at Sèvres, where a site had been purchased. In 1760 Louis XV. purchased the establishment from the company, and appointed M. Boileau director, at a salary of 2000 louis, and a competent staff of the first men in each department of the operations, the royal grant to the manufactory being 96,000 francs. Duplessis, goldsmith to the king, composed the models for the vases. Bachelier superintended the decoration, and directed the painters from the finest examples at his command.

The oldest color is the beautiful bleu de roi. In 1752 Helbot discovered the lively blue-ground color obtained from copper, known as bleu turquoise, and in 1757 the pink known as Du Barry, or Pompadour, was used; and about the same time other chemical experiments resulted in the violet pensée, jaune claire et jonquille, vert-pomme et vert-pré, combinations which, entering as they did into the most delicate composition forming the pâte tendre, rendered the pieces so produced the most beautiful that can be imagined or desired. Madame de Pompadour, whose court influence was supreme for twenty years, gave the factory every encouragement; and doubtless to her artistic taste and her extravagance the Sèvres porcelain of the best period owes much of its fame.

Beautiful, however, as were the productions of the Royal works, the desire to equal the Saxons in their hard paste, and also to imitate the durability and utility of the Chinese and Japanese porcelains, caused continued researches to be made, until in 1761 Pierre Antoine Hanüing, youngest son of the Frankenthal potter, sold the secret of hard-paste porcelain to the Sèvres manufactory. Fortunately the necessary kaolin was accidentally discovered in large quantities near Limoges

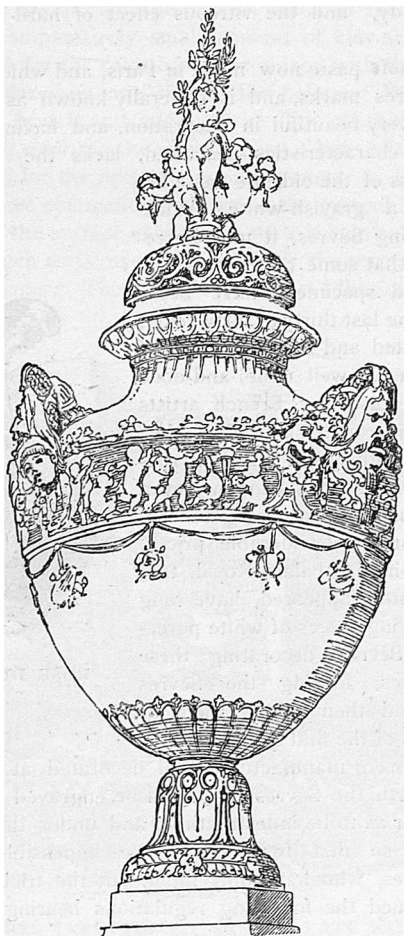
by the wife of a poor surgeon, who had noticed a white unctuous earth, which she thought might be used as a substitute for soap; this, on analysis, proved the desid-



MODERN SÈVRES VASE. IN THE PARIS OPERA HOUSE.

eratum for hard-paste porcelain, and so revolutionized ceramics in France.

The direction passed at M. Boileau's death successively to Parent, 1773, and Regnier, 1779, who, however,



MODERN SÈVRES VASE. IN THE PARIS OPERA HOUSE.

was imprisoned, and a commission, appointed by the convention, administered the affairs of the factory until M. Alexandre Brogniart, to whom ceramics owe so much, was appointed by the First Consul in 1800, and

remained director for nearly fifty years, during which time he founded the Museum of Ceramic Productions, with Napoleon's approval and assistance.

The finest period was, however, that from 1754 to 1764, when the pâte tendre was in its perfection, the more durable and later process preventing that beautiful "blending" of body and decoration which is so eminently artistic.

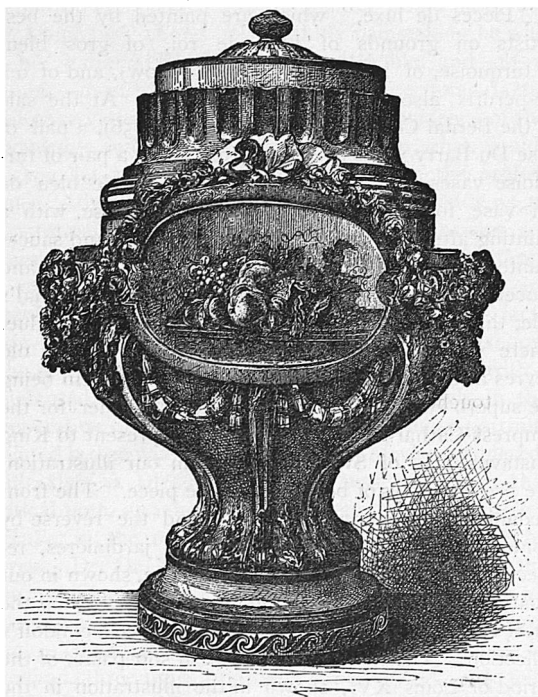
The pâte tendre manufacture never was a staple article of commerce, as the difficulty of its composition, and the loss sustained by its liability to fall in in the process of firing, made it of slow produce and very expensive. Its use, therefore, was from the first limited to the wealthy. Notwithstanding the important discovery of true kaolin in 1768, soft paste continued to be used for the higher objects of art till 1804, as the artists found they could not produce such brilliant effects in glaze and coloring on hard paste as were yielded by the softer material.

The value of Sèvres consists in its creamy and pearly softness, the beauty of its painting, and the depth of its glaze; and these qualities are only united in perfection in the pâte tendre of the early period. There are specimens, however, of the hard paste, which as works of art, in regard to painting, could not be surpassed. In the opinion of some art connoisseurs, early examples of old Sèvres are seldom beautiful, and owe their high value simply to their qualities as bric-à-brac. Mr. W. J. Loftie, in his "Plea for Art at Home," expresses such an opinion, but concedes that "they deserve a certain amount of praise as being among the few original pieces of European work we can point out." "The Sèvres decoration," he says, "was its own invention. It is not imitated from China or Japan, though it has been imitated in all directions of late. The colors are generally staring, but sometimes very delicate, and the little pictures are often exquisite examples of miniature painting." He truly adds, however, that it is not for such specimens that the highest prices are given, but for the early style of purplish pink, known as Rose du Barry, and "an equally unpleasing green, both spotted with a kind of diaper work of feebly-painted rosebuds."

"Pièces de luxe," which are painted by the best artists on grounds of bleu de roi, of gros bleu, of turquoise, of jonquille (a canary yellow), and of œil de perdrix, also sell at very high prices. At the sale of the Bernal Collection in London (in 1856), a pair of rose Du Barry vases sold for £1942 10s.; a pair of turquoise vases sold for £1417 10s.; a single bleu de roi vase for £871 10s.; a single green vase, with a painting after Greuze, for £388 10s.; a cup and saucer painted by Morin for £160; and a jewelled cup and saucer was thought cheap at £80. Since Mr. Bernal's sale, this kind of property has greatly increased in value. There were some remarkable specimens of rare old Sèvres at the late San Donato sale, among them being the superb vase in bleu de roi, made to order for the Empress Catharine II. of Russia, as a present to King Gustavus III. of Sweden, shown in our illustration. We present views of both sides of the piece. The front medallion was painted by Morin, and the reverse by Fontaine. The beautifully-decorated jardinières, respectively in rose Du Barry and turquoise, shown in our illustrations, are painted by Dodin, and were among the finest examples of soft paste Sèvres in Prince Demidoff's collection. The top of a snuff-box in soft paste, of the period of Louis XV., shown in the illustration in the margin, was also among the pieces of the San Donato palace. The deep blue vase in Louis XVI., from the collection of M. Edouard André, and the more elaborately decorated vase of the same period, from the collection of M. Beurdeley, which are shown in our illustrations, were both in the French ceramic department of the Paris Exhibition of 1878. There are but few finer pieces of this epoch than the pair of vases owned by Mrs. Hosack, which are to be seen in the loan collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The medallions are painted by Dodin, and the gilding is by Prevost, the ground being bleu de roi. The picture on one represents Louis XVI. seated and receiving ladies

of the court, who bring to him the newly-born dauphin. That on the other represents the king with his family seated in the garden of the Tuileries. The vases, which are dated 1772 and 1781 respectively, were the private property of the unfortunate monarch, and were sold for him, while in prison, by Gouverneur Morris to Dr. Hosack of New York. This latter gentleman, we believe, was the surgeon at the Burr-Hamilton duel. He was father-in-law to the present owner of the vases. Perhaps the best collection of Sèvres owned in this country is that of Mr. William C. Prime, who contributes to the loan exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum a fine pair of vases (1795-1799) in bleu de roi, decorated with battle scenes of the time of the Crusades; two plates of the 1776 period, decorated with flowers by Le Bel and De Choisy—all soft paste—and several plates in hard paste of various dates in the period of the First Empire and Louis XVIII. The other pieces in the museum are the property of Mrs. George C. Genet. They consist of a pair of richly-decorated egg-shell vases which are of modern Sèvres, and of comparatively small interest, and a remarkably interesting service of soft-paste porcelain of various dates from 1778 to 1784, consisting of the pot, sugar-bowl, creamer, and eleven cups and saucers. This service, which illustrates a great variety of fine work of the factory in ground colors and decorations, like Mrs. Hosack's vases, has a history, having been "gathered from year to year by Madame de Campan and her sisters, maids-of-honor to Marie Antoinette, by whose order they were allowed each year to procure pieces at the factory. This service was presented by them to their mother, Madame Genet, from whom they descended to their present owner." For examples of other periods of Sèvres, the general reader will have to visit the stores of such bric-à-brac dealers as Lanthier, Watson, and Sypher. As ranking with the best American private collections, may be mentioned that of Mr. Luther Kountze, the banker, who possesses, among other fine pieces, a superb pair of modern Sèvres vases in celadon, decorated in pâte-sur-pâte by Solon. They are about eighteen inches high, and are said to be worth £1800. The collection of Mr. S. L. M. Barlow is worthy of note, and Mr. August Belmont has some remarkably fine old pieces of pâte tendre.

Probably the highest price ever realized was for the

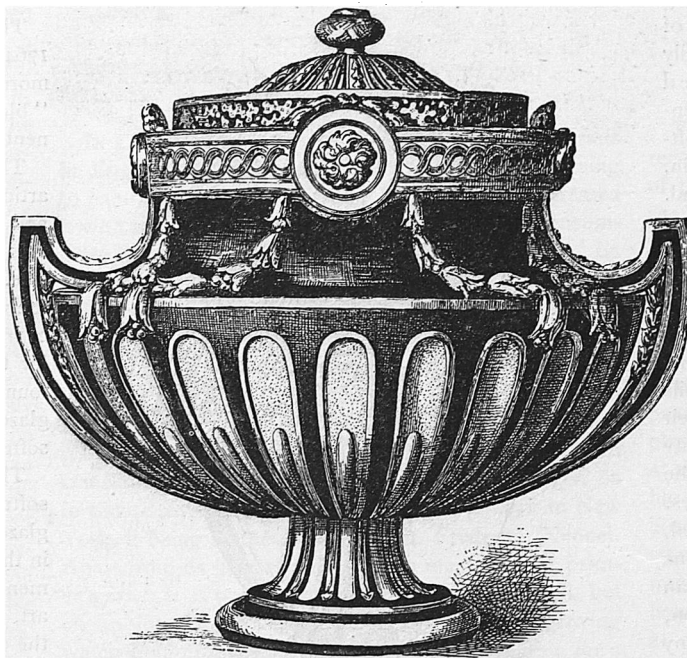


SÈVRES VASE. IN M. BEURDELEY'S COLLECTION.

three fan-shaped vases sold at Lord Coventry's sale, March 23d, 1870, at Christie's Rooms, to Lord Dudley, for £10,200 and commission.

In making purchases of old Sèvres, color being one of the principal features, the collector is cautioned against buying by gaslight. To the modelling of a figure or the shape of a vase, the artificial light is immaterial, but the turquoise, delicate and beautiful as it should be if the veritable pâte tendre, may turn out in the morning a very different color from

that of the previous evening. As has been stated before in these columns, the best method of testing restoration is to touch any of the suspected portions with the edge of a coin. The china will always give a certain *ring* though tapped quite gently, but the same touch upon the *composition* returns a dead, wooden sound. Without doubt, one of the most difficult lessons to learn is, to detect the difference between the beautiful and valuable soft paste, or pâte tendre, of old Sèvres and the pâte d'ur of more recent manufacture,



BLUE SÈVRES VASE. IN M. EDOUARD ANDRÉ'S COLLECTION.

when the art of making the former was discontinued, on account of the superiority of hard paste for durability, and subsequently lost. Old pâte tendre is beautifully white (to examine the paste, undecorated portions of the specimen should be scrutinized), and there is something like the surface of a cheese, a soft, impressionable appearance. The colors, too, and painting appear part and parcel of the "body," and not added superficially, as in the appearance of the hard paste. The coloring is thus beautifully soft, and blended with the "body," and the vitreous effect of hard paste is absent.

The soft paste now made in Paris, and which bears the Sèvres marks, and is generally known as Sèvres, though very beautiful in decoration, and having some of the characteristics described, lacks the peculiar whiteness of the old, the paste being of a grayish-white. While mentioning Sèvres, it may be remarked that some of the sparsely-decorated specimens have been, within the last thirty or forty years, redecorated and refired. Some of these are so well done, and done in some cases by French artists of considerable skill, that they can be with great difficulty detected, and such specimens, even when suspected of being redecorated, bring considerable prices. Dealers in the Palais Royal, too, it has lately appeared, have long been buying pieces of white porcelain at Sèvres, decorating these themselves, forging the Sèvres mark, and then selling them as products of the first quality, and as having been manufactured and decorated at Sèvres. Henceforth the Sèvres mark will be engraved in such a manner as to be indestructible, and under the glazed surface, so that forgery will be impossible. The authorities, who have only found out the trick lately, have issued the following regulations bearing on the subject:

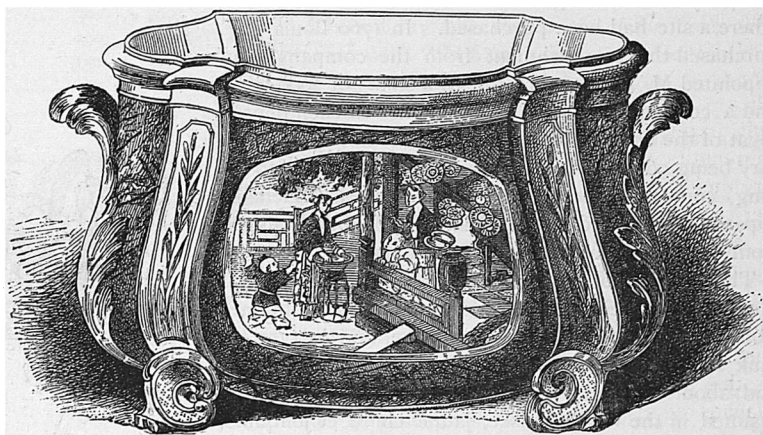
"Article 1. The old Sèvres mark under the glaze is re-established. Article 2. Dating from March 18th, 1880, the sale of the white porcelain of the national manufacture of Sèvres is interdicted. Article 3. Defective works of this manufacture are to be destroyed. Article 4. Objects that are not considered sufficiently good to be decorated will be given gratuitously to the hospitals of Paris,

the mark being obliterated. Article 5. Objects which, although sufficiently good to be decorated, yet do not present all the qualities necessary to be classed in the category 'de choix,' may be sold under the following conditions: They may be decorated with color or with color and gold, but they are not to bear a decoration of gold only; they must receive, beneath the fire-mark, another mark on the glaze bearing these words: 'Elèves de la manufacture de Sèvres.'"

Among the chefs d'œuvres of modern Sèvres probably nothing has surpassed for beauty of decoration and artistic modelling the noble pair of vases which stand in the foyer of the Grand Opera House in Paris, outline illustrations of which are given in the present article.

UNDER-GLAZE DECORATION.

ONE of the most useful of the recent additions to ceramic literature is Miss McLaughlin's unpretending little treatise on under-glaze decoration.* Its author has had abundant and successful experience, and is able to give clear and practical directions for the practice of this attractive branch of art. At the outset she insists upon the necessity of a thorough preparatory study of drawing, and deprecates the "lamentable fact" that much of the pottery now being painted by amateurs "has its value diminished rather than enhanced by the work put upon it." Pottery in general, and the colors to be used in decoration under the glaze, are treated in the opening chapters, and Miss McLaughlin proceeds then to describe the method of painting on pottery discovered (it is said) by M. Laurin at Bourg-la-Reine in 1873, subsequently adopted by Haviland, and rediscovered and applied "by the writer in Cincinnati, in October, 1877." The finished work, done after this method, "presents the appearance of a painting in oil to which a brilliant glaze has been applied." There is no secret about this glaze, the results being due solely to the peculiar method of painting, the relation of the glaze thereto being merely the same as that of the varnish to an oil-painting. The distinguishing feature of the Laurin-Haviland-McLaughlin method of under-glaze decoration consists in the use of clay, which is "mixed with coloring oxides capable of bearing a high degree of heat in firing, and which gives them body, producing a thick impasto in the painting. The work partakes, therefore, both of the nature of painting and modelling, as the high lights may be laid in so thickly as



ROSE DU BARRY SÈVRES JARDINIÈRE. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION.

to produce an actual relief." Concerning these clay colors Miss McLaughlin says:

"It is somewhat difficult, indeed, almost impossible to give a correct idea of the palettes to be used in this kind of painting. If colors could be procured, already prepared for use, as oil paints are, and these colors had the same appearance after firing as before, it would be comparatively an easy task. As it is, the colors must be mixed with clays in certain proportions, and, on account of the change produced by firing, the proportions necessary to produce the intensity of color

* Pottery Decoration Under the Glaze. By M. Louise McLaughlin. Cincinnati; Robert Clarke & Co. Pp. 95. Price, \$1.00.

desired can only be determined from experience. The result, after the work is finished, differs from its appearance before firing to a greater extent than in any other kind of decoration upon pottery. As a rule it may be said that the colors are intensified by firing. Experience only can give an accurate idea of these changes.

"The clay which is to form a body for the colors must be dissolved in water until of a proper consistency for painting. The clay used in the manufacture of white granite ware is probably the best clay for this purpose generally accessible. This can be mixed with all the colors without injury to the tint of any. Parian clay produces the most beautiful effects, and, where it is possible to procure it, forms the best medium for this painting. In the case of yellow, which does not always stand the fire well, it is best to mix the color with a yellow-tinted clay; in the case of scarlet, pink or crimson, and greens, nothing but white clay must be used, if purity of tint is desired. A palette or a slab of glass may be used for mixing the colors and clay. The powdered colors as procured are not perfectly pulverized, and must be well rubbed down, with a muller and palette-knife, before being mixed. The white clay takes the place of white, and is used to lighten every tint as well as to form a body for the colors. In the

the coating of clay is very quickly absorbed into the body, and this causes it to shrink unequally with the body and thus to crack. When the body and the applied clay are more nearly in the same condition, and



SÈVRES JARDINIÈRE. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION.

the former still retains considerable moisture, it does not absorb that of the clay on the surface so rapidly, and they shrink and dry together. The drying of the clay used in painting can be retarded by the use of gum tragacanth. It would be better not to mix the gum with more of the clay than is to be used at once; if allowed to dry upon the palette the gum will not redissolve readily, and the mixture will be unpleasant to work with."

For the actual process of painting Miss McLaughlin gives directions as follows:

"Let us suppose that the artist wishes to paint a vase. A certain tint being selected for the ground, the color, or colors, which are to produce it are mixed in their relative proportions. A sufficient quantity should be prepared to paint the whole ground, especially if a mixed tint, which it would be difficult to reproduce in its exact proportions. It will require some little experience to enable the artist to judge how much will be needed, and perhaps it will be somewhat difficult for any one accustomed to painting in other methods to realize the quantity of paint used in this. It is better to have too much mixed than too little, as it can be kept and used another time. The color, or colors, for the ground, having been rubbed down until perfectly smooth, may be mixed with more or less clay, according to the shade of color desired. The first tint may be made to represent the darkest shade in the ground, and a comparatively small amount of clay should be used. After the color has been mixed with the clay it can be placed on one side of the palette. By taking portions from it and adding more clay, other shades of the same color may be made. First a light tint may be prepared for the first coat upon the vase.

"Before commencing to lay on the ground it is well to wash the surface of the vase with a thin solution of glaze, such as is used for finishing the ware, or with borax water. This is to insure the adhesion of the

sprinkled until it has absorbed water enough to keep the clay, which is to be applied to its surface, from drying too quickly. A broad, flat camel's-hair brush may then be charged with the light tint, and the surface of the vase covered with it as evenly as possible, and so thickly as to completely obscure the body. This done, another tint, darker than the first, in a degree sufficient to permit their being distinguished from each other, may be mixed. This will form the middle tint of the ground, and is to be laid on over the first. The reason for applying two coats is that, although it might be possible to paint one with the degree of thickness necessary to prevent the shrinkage of the applied clay in the firing from revealing the body of the vase, still the beginner is very likely to be deceived as to the thickness of the impasto, judging by the eye alone. It is better therefore to apply two coats, so that one may cover up the deficiencies of the other. The reason for having these two coats of different tints is that it is then possible to be assured that the surface is covered completely, it being easy to distinguish the first tint laid from the body of the vase, and in the second painting to observe that it entirely covers the first.

"The second coat finished, a lighter tint should be



BLUE SÈVRES VASE. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION. MEDALLION PAINTED BY MORIN.

use of scarlet, crimson, and yellow, a considerable amount of the color in proportion to the clay must be used for the darker portions, to give sufficient depth. It is a good plan, where experience has rendered it possible to do it with judgment and certainty of result, to mix the various tints in water with clay, in quantities, and then allow them to dry. When dry they can be pulverized, and the colored powder can be put away in bottles for future use."

As to the state of the ware to be decorated under the glaze, Miss McLaughlin remarks:

"For this method of decoration the ware should be in the 'green' state. The more moisture it contains the better. Pieces can be kept in this state a considerable length of time by placing them in a box lined with plaster of Paris about an inch thick; if the inside is occasionally sprinkled with water it will remain moist and keep the clay in good condition even two or three months. It is necessary to exercise this care in keeping the ware moist in order to prevent the clay which is applied to the surface in painting from cracking during the process of drying. It must always be borne in mind that the material made use of in painting is simply clay, which has been artificially colored, and, as clay, becomes subject to the rules which govern all work of this kind, whether it is making pottery, modelling, or painting faïence. In this case the clay is used as paint, and must be of such consistency as will permit its manipulation with the brush. When the piece of ware upon which this painting is applied has previously become too dry, the moisture in

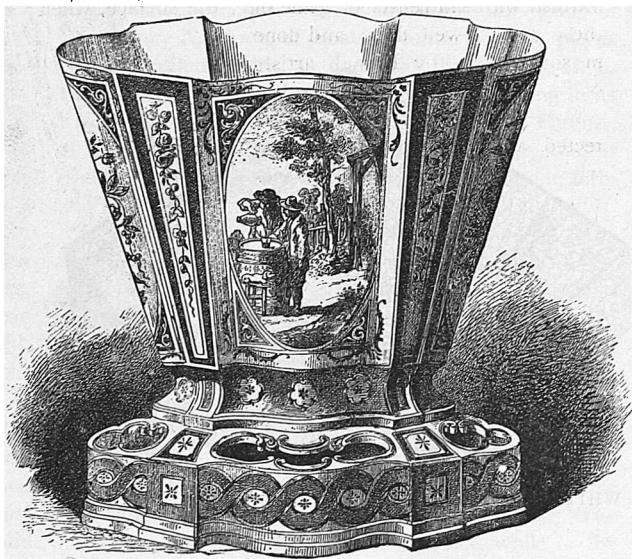


BLUE SÈVRES VASE. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION. MEDALLION PAINTED BY FONTAINE.

mixed, with which the ground is varied by touches here and there, making the highest light of the ground, while touches of the first tint mixed give the darker shades. There should be difference, enough in tone

between the middle tints of the ground and these lighter and darker tints, to produce a good effect of light and shade, and these touches should be laid on with a free hand, and then softened into the ground, care being taken that the lights and shadows should not end too abruptly. In these touches, as in all the painting, there must be a certain thickness in reality as well as in appearance, to make the work effective when finished. The clay shrinks and seems to be dissipated in the process of firing, and if applied too thinly, in any part, will reveal the body of the ware or some under-tint, perhaps, spoiling the appearance of the whole.

"The ground finished, the decorative design may be painted upon it. This should not be outlined upon the surface, but should simply be painted with a free hand, and without too much attention to detail, a brilliant effect of light, shade, and color being the object aimed at in this style of painting. We will suppose that a floral design is to be painted upon the base. The middle tint of the flowers can first be laid, the shadows are then put in, and lastly the high lights, laid on heavily, almost giving the effect of relief. Leaves and other accessories of the design may be treated in the same manner. The edge of the design must be softened into the background, to avoid a hard effect after the work is glazed."



BLUE SÈVRES JARDINIÈRE. IN THE LATE SAN DONATO COLLECTION.

clay, of which the painting is to consist, to the clay of which the vase is made. Previous to this the vase, if not already in good condition, should be washed over with a brush, or with a sponge dipped in water, or